

Senator Pam Helming

Representing the 54th New York Senate District



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SENATOR PAM HELMING: WE MUST PROTECT OUR FIRST RESPONDERS

Our local firefighters and other first responders, such as our EMTs, do an absolutely outstanding job of serving and protecting our communities during emergencies and times of crisis. They perform their tremendous responsibilities at minimal cost to the taxpayers. The only thing they ask for in return is the tools they need to protect the public and themselves.

Many local first responders have reached out to share their serious concerns about the recent changes to the state's bail and discovery laws. Law enforcement leaders and district attorneys on both sides of the political aisle are opposed to these reforms and agree that they need to be repealed and/or heavily amended. These changes basically create a 'catch and release' program for alleged criminals and sadly, we are already seeing the consequences locally.

It's no secret that I stand opposed to these changes. I voted against this legislation and remain one of the most outspoken voices against these so-called 'reforms,' because of the very real impact they are having in communities across our region.

While I am open to amending existing laws to ensure that they are fair to everyone, these sweeping reforms were tucked into the state budget and passed in the dark of the night. There were no hearings or opportunities for input from the law enforcement/first responder community. Although there are currently some minimal privacy protections afforded to law enforcement officers under this new legislation, these same protections are *not* extended to emergency first responders such as firefighters and EMS workers.

Whether by intentional omission or a simple mistake, this flaw was created and exposes a volunteer firefighter's personal address and contact information to defendants, despite the fact that he or she simply responded to the call of duty to assist the defendant or others involved in an emergency situation.

I feel very strongly that the personal information of all first responders and their families should be safeguarded. That's why I have worked with my colleague, Senator Jim Tedisco, to sponsor legislation (S.7280) which would protect the privacy of all emergency responders and prevent their personal information from being shared.

You can help push for the passage of this public safety legislation. Contact the Governor, Senate Majority Leader and Assembly Speaker. Share your concerns and ask them to bring S.7280 to the floor for a vote. Here is their contact information:

- Governor Andrew Cuomo 518-474-8390
- Senate Majority Leader Andrew Stewart-Cousins 518-455-2585
- Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie 518-455-3791

It is difficult enough to recruit new volunteers; our local departments don't need another obstacle as they work to ensure that they have enough people to respond to emergencies. Our brave firefighters and EMTs should not have their own personal safety and that of their families jeopardized because of an oversight or the blatant disregard of New York City lawmakers who are determined to enact changes that will garner the most media attention.

Please know that as your New York State Senator, I will continue to be a loud and outspoken advocate on behalf of all first responders. We have a duty and obligation to protect public safety and the privacy of those who answer the call of duty in our communities.

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